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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone conversation with President
Vladimir Putin of the Russia Federation. (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Putin

Notetakers: Andy Green, Marko Broz,
Jeff Blair

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko

DATE, TIME March 18, 2003, 9:29 - 9:50 a.m. EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hey Vladimir, how are you today? (U)

President Putin: Very well, and I am glad to hear you. (U)

The President: I told you that we would continue to discuss matters of world issues. This is just another chance to continue efforts to talk leader to leader. (U)

President Putin: Yes. I was looking forward to your call. (U)

The President: Thank you and a couple points that I would like to make and then I would like to hear what you have to say. I appreciate Igor's article in some of our papers talking about the U.S.-Russian partnership. We should not endanger this relationship. That is what you and I discussed, and I appreciate your talking with the American public along these lines. I recognized that we will never come to the same conclusion on Saddam Hussein, but I did try very hard in the U.N. to achieve a consensus. For right now, the U.N. process is over as far as I am concerned. There is a role for the United Nations after operations, if there are military operations. There will be a role for the U.N. in the post-Saddam Iraq after the war. I just want to assure you of that. Finally, and I say if a war comes because perhaps the initiative that you tried could come to fruition and Saddam could still leave. Finally, I think it is important that we watch this anti-American sentiment. You have been good about not enflaming anti-American

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Classified by: Gregory L. Schulte

Reason: 1.5(d)

Declassify on: 3/19/13

NW#: 78134 DocId: 34685315

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sentiment but in some capitals they have not been as cautious. For instance, in Paris there is anti-American sentiment and because of that there is a significant anti-French backlash that has been hard for me to manage. I know that you know this, and I appreciate your understanding, but there is a difference between disagreeing on an issue and unnecessarily enflaming the passions of the people with anti-American slogans and bashing of leaders. You have been firm in your opinion but respectful of our relationship, and I want to thank you for that. That is all that is on my mind today, and I am confident that we will continue the dialogue as matters unfold. I appreciate your taking my phone call. (S)

President Putin: Thank you, George. Thank you for your call. This is important for me. It is true that your opinions on Iraq diverge from mine. I have carefully studied your address to the nation, and I cannot say that I agree with everything in the address, but I do believe that the fundamental significance of our state-to-state relationship is more important. Even more important to me are our personal relations, and as you can see, I am refraining from commenting on your address. If the military operation does start, then I will have to comment, but I will not make comments in a way that will belittle our personal relationship. As far as our disagreement on the political issue is concerned, I will just say that we have discussed this more than once, and I can see some specific things that I find wrong. I believe that if we had acted jointly and consistently without the use of military force, then we could have achieved the same result. This concerns not only Iraq but also the rest of the Middle East region. We could have pressured other countries in a way that could have benefited the region as a whole. The second point that I would like to draw your attention to, is that, and I believe this is significant. You said that the goal is a regime change; however, this is not something provided for in the U.N. charter or in international law. Also, it would be unfair to say that the Iraqis have done nothing. Your military preparations and diplomatic channels have pushed Iraq to do many things. The most important thing, and I have already mentioned this, is that we should not substitute the law of force for international law. I do agree that we should bring this process back to the channel of the U.N. and this should be regardless of how the situation in Iraq unfolds. In this vein, I have given instructions to Ivanov to go to New York tonight. His mission is not to score propaganda points with regard to the Iraq situation and it will not be to enflame anti-American sentiment in the U.N. It will be to determine the future of inspections. We have sent them there

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to facilitate the process, and we should at least thank them. Some of them have even died, as you know. I talked earlier today with the new president of the People's Republic of China, and he told me that one of his best people died there. This is an important instrument of international inspection, and we should not lose this. We should jointly see how we can minimize the damage to the U.N. I would like to repeat this. I know about the sentiments of your aides, and I do think we should return the process to the U.N. ~~(S)~~

The President: Let me make sure we are clear on this. I think the United Nations should be involved afterwards if there are military operations, but my judgment is that the United Nations is through. ~~(S)~~

President Putin: This is what I meant. (U)

The President: Okay. (U)

President Putin: If the war does start, then later on we should return to the process of the United Nations. This will be in the interest of the United States. ~~(S)~~

The President: Okay. I understand what you are saying. I agree. (U)

President Putin: In spite of the differences on Iraq, the United States and Russia should cooperate in the interests of international peace and stability. I know that the United States Senate has ratified the Treaty on the reduction of strategic potentials, and we have sent the Treaty to our Duma and it is scheduled to be voted on this Friday. ~~(S)~~

The President: Oh good, Vladimir. Thank you. (U)

President Putin: If a military operation does start, then we might want to hold back on this due to unfolding events in Iraq so that there is no scandal. ~~(S)~~

The President: I understand. (U)

President Putin: This could make things worse. ~~(S)~~

The President: I am confident. Aren't you confident that you can get it passed? ~~(S)~~

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President Putin: Yes. It will pass, and I would like to reiterate that our goal is to cooperate with the United States. It will pass. The only issue is the tactics in terms of the time frame. (S)

The President: I understand. (U)

President Putin: I agree with you that right now it is important for us to demonstrate that our long-term commitment is to cooperation with the United States. (C)

The President: It was just confirmed. That is great. (U)

President Putin: Thank you, George. (U)

The President: That is all for today. (U)

President Putin: Finally, I would like to repeat the invitation to you to come to St. Petersburg later this year. This would be an important meeting regardless of how the situation in Iraq unfolds because it would be a rather informal event. It would be even better to get together to discuss this and other important issues as well. (S)

The President: I hope to be able to make it. I know you put a lot of planning into it. St. Petersburg is one of the greatest cities in the world. Another thing, I appreciate your instructions to Igor to come and not enflame passions. I appreciate that a lot. You know how those diplomats can behave. I have trouble with mine as well. (S)

President Putin: Yes. It should not become a sport. (U)

The President: I have trouble reining mine in as well. Vladimir, I will talk to you soon. My best to your family. (C)

President Putin: All the best to your family too. (U)

--End of Conversation--

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